THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER.

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE

ARCH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

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BY

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SERMON.

"A good soldier of Jesus Christ."—2 *Timothy* ii. 3.

This is Paul's striking representation of a Christian life. And it teaches us, by implication, that the profession of a soldier is not necessarily sinful. If it were, he might as consistently have urged Timothy to be a good thief, or robber, or murderer for Christ, as a good soldier. War is always a calamity — a fearful evil, which the Gospel proposes finally to banish from the earth. But it will abolish war, as it will abolish capital punishments, by subduing the passions and restraining the crimes which render them alike necessary. Until this thorough regeneration of human nature, a lawful war is only a forcible self-preservation by government. And valuable as human life is, there are other things more so. The martyr sacrifices life because truth is dearer—the patriot, because liberty is dearer. So that, in maintaining its own rightful authority, a government is unquestionably justifiable in the shedding of blood. This truth, we say, is implied in the text, where warfare is

used by an inspired apostle as a fitting illustration of a Christian's life.

This is a common and favorite metaphor of Paul; and like all his comparisons, is neither far-fetched nor fanciful. This apostle never goes out of his way to discover subtle analogies. His illustrations have nothing in common either with the startling metaphors of wit, or the elusive similitudes of humor. So natural are they always, so simple, so graphic, so apparently a part of his subject, rather than a peculiarity of his style, that, in some cases at least, we can hardly call them metaphors. When Paul calls the Christian a soldier, it is not merely a comparison, but almost a literal description. A Christian is not only like a soldier, he positively is a soldier. His enemies are real enemies; his equipments are real armor; his life is a real battle. So at least Paul considered them. Standing in the arena of earthly life, hemmed in by mighty adversaries, advancing to carry for Christ the strongholds of iniquity, he seemed to himself as literally a soldier, with helmet, and breastplate, and spear, and sword, as any Roman legionary following the imperial eagles to the conquest of the world.

But our present design is neither to justify nor illustrate this metaphor, but to deduce from it some lessons of practical instruction. We are all learning just now, as never before, what are some of the qualities of a good soldier;

and we propose to illustrate by them some analogous qualities of true piety in "*a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*"

Doing this most simply and desultorily, we remark: First, *That a soldier is an enrolled—an enlisted man.* No matter what else he may be, or have; though his house be full of armor, and his heart of courage, he is not called "a soldier" till his name is enrolled in some military company. And in like manner is this necessary in regard of religious life. Let a man be as good as he may; yet, on the admitted principle that there is no neutrality in warfare, he will be counted with Christ's enemies until he avows himself his friend. We all see the force of this truth in temporal conflicts. The whole community is demanding, and rightly, that, in regard of this impending war, every man's sentiments shall be distinctly made known. And God demands the same manifestation in regard of spiritual things; that if a man truly love Christ, he shall confess him before men. There is, indeed, on this point, a striking analogy between carnal and spiritual soldiership. The reasons for public enlistment are the same: first, that the man may be benefited by the discipline of the drill and the fellowship in the battle; and secondly, that the cause may be strengthened by combination and system.

A warfare would be waged very greatly at a disadvantage, if, instead of scientific organization, each man were

left to fight with the enemy just when and where and how he might choose. We see this in temporal things, and should see it in spiritual. Verily, the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

Many men professing to love God and to be at heart Christians, plead excuses for not uniting with the people of God, which would sound strangely if urged for declining enlistment in an army. One man says, "Oh, I am not yet good enough to unite with the church." Another says, "There are so many hypocrites in the church, I will have nothing to do with them." Another, "I am afraid if I make a profession I shall not persevere." And yet another, "I intend to do it at some future time, but am not yet quite ready." And all this just as if a man, urged to volunteer, when his country was invaded, should say in excuse, "Oh, I am afraid I am a traitor;" or, "I do not like the character of the recruits, and prefer being enrolled with the enemy;" or, "I fear if I enlist that I shall prove a coward and run away in the battle;" or, "I intend to enlist at some future time, when the war is over and the soldiers return in triumph." And surely, no brave man would utter such excuses; for any one of them would convict him, on his own confession, either of cowardice or treason.

For all efficient spiritual or temporal soldiership, enroll-

ment is necessary. Alike in both, it is comparatively of small moment what company you join. These Christian denominations are finely in analogy with the different regiments of an army; they are the infantry and cavalry and artillery of the redeemed host, bearing the same banner, and keeping step to the same music, and following the same great Captain to the conquest of the world! Let every man, in this matter, be guided by his own tastes and affinities. I would no more urge all men to be Presbyterians than I would insist that every volunteer should shoulder the same weapon and wear the same uniform. There is need of diversity. We want infantry, and cavalry,—men with the sword, and men with the bayonet; one, strong to storm fortresses, and another, rapid to pursue fugitives!

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Let him be a methodist, or a baptist, or a churchman, or a presbyterian—only let him be a Christian! The world will look on him as no friend to religion so long as he hesitates to profess it openly; just as in times of war we distrust either the courage or the bravery of the man who refuses to enroll his name with the defenders of his country!

To enlist is the first thing, and the next is *equipment*. So we remark: Secondly, *That a good soldier looks well to the quality and condition of his armor*. The old sword, that

for half a century has rusted in its scabbard, and the old musket, disused since the Revolution, and wanting a lock or a bayonet, are not exactly the arms for a great national battle. And unto the Christian soldier the condition of his armor is no less important. Christ, the great Captain, furnishes all who will follow him, with a glorious panoply, "*The Girdle of Truth;*" "*The Breastplate of Righteousness;*" "*The Sandals of Service;*" "*The Shield of Faith;*" "*The Helmet of Salvation;*" "*The Sword of the Spirit.*" But it is the soldier's duty to see that every part of this armor is kept bright, and strong, and in constant preparation for battle.

And alas for Christian neglect in this matter! Our soldiership is rather that of the peace-establishment than of the active campaign. We have certain set days of parade and inspection; perhaps quarterly, in the week preceding the sacrament. Then there is an unusually large mustering of spiritual recruits; church-members that have not been seen there for three months, appear in the prayer-room. A solemn routine of self-examination is gone through with; the spiritual armor is looked to; the old breastplate of righteousness is brought forth and furbished; the sword of the Spirit unsheathed and sharpened; the girdle of truth tightened about the loins, and the latchets of the sandals renewed or strengthened.

And this is all well so far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. It ends with the occasion. With the sacramental hymn and benediction closes the parade. The Christian panoply is put off and neglected again; the old shield gathers rust, the sword loses its sharp point and fine edge, and the man himself is scarcely recognized as a warrior till the next quarterly muster for review and inspection. And this all grows out of a misconception of Christian life. That life is a *soldiership;* the Christian is not a mere recruit, with his name on the muster-roll, nor simply an armor keeper and scourer, but a veritable warrior, face to face with the foe and in the very press of the battle.

Therefore, we remark: Thirdly, *That a good soldier is a strategist, using his strength and weapons wisely and against real enemies.* He does not fire blank cartridges; nor shoot balls at a dead target; nor in the real battle does he concentrate his forces, and waste his strength upon the unimportant points of his enemy. And a Christian should imitate him. If he is fighting with the enemy *within him,* it is with his easily besetting sin, his own master-iniquity, he should most earnestly wrestle. But alas for our spiritual soldiership! We are always lamenting and striving with our smaller iniquities! We are always bemoaning and confessing the besetting sins of our neighbors!

Those evil propensities that are so strongly developed in our lives that the world knows us by and calls us by them, as, the *covetous* man, or the *vain* man, or the *trifling* man, or the *untruthful* man, or the *censorious* man; these you never hear us confessing, nor observe us striving with. We are skirmishing at the out-posts and with the feebler adversaries, rather than launching the artillery of heaven against the serried ranks, or the great citadel of iniquity.

And our spiritual strategy is as poor when we fight with the enemy *without us*. Much of the good we might do is lost through misdirected effort; this misdirection is manifold.

The Christian *minister* is preaching against some doctrinal error of a former generation, and setting forth the iniquities of the Pharisees and Sadducees of the first century, or those wicked men of the nineteenth, who never, even by accident, are found in God's house—instead of aiming his arrow's point blank at the sins and shortcomings of the men and women and children who make up his congregation,—as if a soldier should aim his shotted gun at a dead tree, and fire blank cartridges at the living enemy.

The Christian *reformer* is putting forth all his strength against some outward form of iniquity, forgetting that the secret of all true reformation is a regenerated nature; and that, for the permanent improvement of popular

morals we want not so much human laws around the outward activities as the law of God in the heart. As if a commander, attempting to surprise an encamped enemy, should waste time in securing every sentinel at the outposts, instead of hurling his forces into the heart of the camp.

The Christian *champion* is putting forth all his logical strength against various forms of infidelity and Anti-Christ, which, in avowed enmity are arrayed against the Gospel, not perceiving that, after all, the church's greatest hinderances are the worldliness, and sectarianism, and covetousness, and sloth, that exist in her own bosom.

In a word, we are wasting our strength on the weaker and least important points of our adversaries. And Satan never so rejoices as when he can raise a false issue in his arguments with believers, or mislead the Christian soldier to waste his strength in partial skirmishes, rather than with the sagacity of true soldiership to concentrate all his forces in one mighty tide of battle.

We repeat it, Christian life is a real soldiership. Not merely the parade and review, the carrying of armor that never was used, and the following banners that never waved in the van of the battle, the simple muster and drill, keeping step in citizen's dress to holiday music, a hundred miles away from the enemy's nearest encampment, but it is a real manœuvre in the face of the foe—a

stern, unyielding, uncompromising fight unto the death with fierce and terrible battalions!

And now, lest we should weary you, passing from the outward acts of good soldiership to its inner qualities of character, we remark: Fourthly, *That a good soldier is a brave man.* In regard of things temporal, so manifestly is this a truism as to need no illustration. The idea of a timid soldier is simply absurd; for a coward is as surely court-marshalled and cashiered as a traitor. And quite as essential is courage in a good soldier of Christ. This virtue has many counterfeits.

Rashness counterfeits it; fearless only in fool-hardiness, thoughtless of expediency or propriety, of present conditions or probable results, rushing forth in Quixotic chivalry to break a lance with every seeming of error, and pricking every monster out of its den just for the sake of a battle.

Obstinacy counterfeits it; a moral vis-inertiæ, determined to have its own way in spite of the universe; either standing like a dead rock against the living waters of reform, or rushing like a destroying avalanche onward in a headlong and hurtful progress.

Impudence counterfeits it; mistaking modesty for shame, and brutality for bravery; it becomes coarse, discourteous, unseemly under the fair pretence of being plain-spoken and honest.

Even *Cowardice* counterfeits it; assuming lofty airs and

uttering great swelling words; making everywhere proclamation that *it does not care*, and *is not afraid*, hoping to pass upon men the shadow for the substance, and to give to a "Scotch-mist" the seeming of a mountain.

Many things indeed counterfeit it; but from them all true Christian bravery is easily distinguished. *Courage* is a beautiful word; it means heart-age! A composite of many fine and rare qualities. True courage is *wise;* it moves ever under the direction of a sound judgment, taking counsel of prudence, and walking hand-in-hand with discretion. True courage is *modest;* it does not strut and swagger; if it stand firm, it moves gently. True courage is *loving and genial;* it has an exquisite sense of proprieties and courtesies, a heart full of tender regard for human feelings and interests.

True courage, in a word, is not brutal hardihood, but human heart-age. And very greatly is it needed in a soldier of Christ. His warfare is in the face of foes innumerable and mighty, and he must be a brave man or he will be finally worsted. Christian life is a warfare fought at every step of its ascending progress, from the deep vale of penitence to the mountain heights of glory. And we want the grand old apostolic bravery; not merely the resolute strength for endurance, but the eager zeal that is impatient of delay, and pants for the battle.

Passing this, we observe, Fifthly, *That a good soldier*

loves his comrades. His heart may glow with all generous emulation, but gives no place to malignant jealousy or envy. There may be, and in a great army must be, different bands, diversely accoutred, and they may have come from distant sections, between which, have at times arisen commercial jealousies and fierce State rivalries, and yet, if the same beloved banner be borne aloft in the march, they will be brothers to the end of it.

This, indeed, is one of the few beautiful things that are developed in war; this grand brotherhood of soldiers. The patriot's battle-march is on earth's high places above the dust and din of small local strife. The presence of a common foe sweeps away, for the time, all meaner jealousies. The weak bonds of the older or later historic confederacies have thus, for the time, become mighty—the ancient Grecian States, diverse in interests and dialects, and hating and quarrelling with each other—the German Confederacy, with its numerous and jealous principalities and free cities—the Republic of Switzerland, with its separate and rival and discordant Cantons—all loosely united by fretted bonds, and yet all knit into strong, majestic nationality whenever the armed foot of invasion dared cross the common border!

And so, always. This brotherhood of soldiership overcomes all smaller strifes; all rivalry of races; all jealousies of regions, till men thus have hated each other, and

slandered each other for a generation, march side by side and shoulder to shoulder, against the common foe.

And especially should this be true of the good soldier of Jesus Christ. There may be, indeed must be, different sects in the Christian Church. So feeble are the powers of the human mind and so infinite the truths of revelation, that our views of them must vary from our different stand-points. Meanwhile, so unlike are we constitutionally, in temperament, and taste, that the very ceremonies of our worship may consistently, perhaps necessarily, differ. Nevertheless, all this should not interfere with our entire and intense brotherly love for all Christians. Never will the gospel of Christ have free course and be glorified till the watchmen see eye to eye as they look on the battle, leaving every soldier to wear his own costume and wield his own weapons, and beholding all these different creeds and ceremonies with as true a complacency as we look upon the various equipments of armed men, keeping step to the same music and going forth to the same battle. Never, indeed, till we can bid every man God-speed in casting out devils, and, calling ourselves by whatever names we may, yet baptized all with the same loving baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire, can go forth as brethren by a tie tenderer than that born of the same father's house and the same mother's cradle, glad, each, of the other's strength, and proud, each, of the other's

honors, to bear the same banner through the press of the same battle, at the call of the same Leader—"*good soldiers of Christ.*"

This leads me to remark, Sixthly, *That a good soldier engages personally in the conflict.* He does not stand an idle spectator like the brethren of David, to see how the lad would bear himself in face of the Philistine, but no sooner does the trumpet sound than he springs forward eager to take his own part in the battle. And here, methinks, is a great want of Christian soldiership—this deep abiding sense of personal responsibility. Practically, many professing Christians seem but lookers-on in the battle—a sort of "home-guard," enjoying pleasant re-unions for drill after business hours and in the cool of the evening, staying at home as a privileged "reserve," while the President and the Generals take care of the rebels. But surely, this is a mistake. The "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" is to active and efficient service. Some professing Christians tell us, with a seeming of true humility, that they have no talents wherewith to serve God, and therefore can do nothing for their blessed Redeemer. But certain it is, if they can not greatly glorify God, that they are not true Christians—if they can not give light to the world, then God has never kindled them!

If you are a redeemed creature in Christ, with the grace of God in the spirit, and the love of God in the

heart, then have you been new-created for some great purpose, and can accomplish some noble work; and setting yourself to find out what is your duty, you are as solemnly bound to perform it as was Paul to preach the Gospel for the salvation of men. Surely, the man who reposes indolently in his tent when the trumpet has sounded, and men strive for the mastery, has no claim either to the reward or the title of "*a good soldier of Christ.*"

Let me remark again, and lest I should weary you, Finally: *That the good soldier's great aim is the final victory.* No true man goes a soldiering for the pleasure of the thing, and whatever thoughts of personal profit or honor may add to his ardor, they are all involved in, as they depend upon, the success of the conflict. And this is another of those beautiful things developed in war—the subordination of all smaller and meaner ends to one great master-purpose. We see this finely displayed in the national war we are now waging. It was only yesterday when the public opinion of Europe sneered at the American people, as a nation of traders, loving and caring for nothing but money. It did really seem that the descendants of the old pilgrims were only hucksters and chapmen, and that the very Ark of God, brought over in the May Flower, had been profaned into the shrine of a golden image. Our fair flag seemed precious only because it

protected our commerce, and the old eagle only honored when it screamed over our gold! But it seems so no longer. This uprising of the old patriotism has swept the stream of life clear of this lumber of covetousness. When the issue is fairly between the cotton-trade and a country, the answer is glorious!

If there are on this continent, men of American birth and blood, who yet, in their miserable selfishness, ask only, how prices-current are affected by the old Washingtonian Constitution? And who weigh this republican government, and the grand liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, against the profits of free trade under a confederation of traitors; we rejoice to know that they have renounced the old American name, and keep step to other music, and unfurl other banners! Creatures do after their kind, and it is eminently befitting that the serpent should coil and hiss when such spirits are marshalled. And we exult that our eagle looks down this day only upon children of the old patriots, men of the same self-sacrificing spirit! This struggle is working out a grand moral regeneration in the midst of us. American covetousness dies under the breath of American patriotism. And the world is learning that republican institutions develop, not mere traders and shopmen, but men of the old heroic impulses, worthy of their ancestry and traditions; who, like their fathers, count their treasure

and blood only as the dust of the desert when the stake of the mighty game is a great Christian nationality.

We repeat it, in this war, as in all, the aim of the good soldier is the final victory. It is no longer a question of cost or time; of privation or suffering; the hearts of men are set on this one simple end—a government strong, established, triumphant, permanent as the hills, and broad as the continent! And all smaller and meaner issues—the jealousy of parties, the policy of states, the rivalry of regions—have been swept away in the overflow of this glorious master-passion.

And such should be the ruling impulse of a good soldier of Christ Jesus—a desire for the ultimate success—the last great victory—the triumph of the individual spirit when the warfare is ended—the establishment of Christ's kingdom over a revolted world! For this, and this only, does a Christian live in the world. Not that he may enjoy its pleasures and secure its honors, but that God may be glorified in the warfare he is waging! Let him therefore emulate the children of this world, wise in their generation. Observe well the impulses of this uprising patriotism. See how these rich men lavish treasure as dust, when the country needs it! How these strong men count not their lives dear to them, when their land is dishonored! How weeping wives, and mothers, and sisters

bid earnest farewell to those dearer them than their own life, when a distressed land calls them to the battle!

And, alas, how this shames our Christian soldiership! Oh, for a like measure of consecration to Christ Jesus—for the old apostolic and Pauline loyalty, that gloried in sacrifices and suffering, and counted life itself not dear, and all things as dust, that it might extend the triumphs of the glorious Gospel! Would that our soldiership for Christ were worthy to be compared with this soldiership for our country! Surely it ought to be, for interests far more precious are at stake, and vaster and grander are the results of victory! The Christian warfare is with sin's dread despotism—that the strongholds of iniquity may be carried by assault, and a redeemed world be given to Christ for his inheritance. And such a cause should inspire us with Paul's burning chivalry. It is high time that Christianity were triumphant everywhere, that its challenge were pressed upon every champion of evil, and its banner flying over every fastness of iniquity. This day there should be a missionary of the cross in every hamlet, and a Bible in every house of earth's wide-spread population. God's providence and God's Spirit call the Christian soldier to arms. The islands wait for us, the continents wait for us, the whole world waits for us. If there was ever a fair field for the exploits of soldier-

ship, earth offers that field now to the forces of Christianity. And our hearts should feel the inspiration, as the old veteran soldiery, when the ranks are marshalled, and the banners advanced, and the weapons flash in air, hear the cry of their glorious leader, and rush as a whirlwind on the ranks of the enemy! This emphatically is "*a good fight*," and the Christian should prove himself pre-eminently "*a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*"

Learn then the parable of an earthly warfare! Apply its tests and tactics to spiritual experience! Go over one by one these excellences of a carnal soldiership, and see whether, as possessed of their spiritual analogies, you can call yourselves Christians! Are you enlisted men? Are your names on the roll-call? Are you equipped with the whole panoply of Christ? Are you brave, earnest, active in the very press of the battle? Are you struggling every day with sin in your members, and agonizing for greater attainments in holiness? Are you laboring with all the talents God has given you for the salvation of men, and striving with Paul's restless zeal to win back a revolted world to the peaceful reign of Immanuel? Are you fighting a battle? Are you "*good soldiers of Jesus Christ?*"

If so, then unspeakably are you blessed! Unto no finite nature hath been vouchsafed a glory like this "*calling*"—this "*high* calling"—this "high calling *of God*"—

this "high calling of God *in Christ Jesus.*" True, indeed, while on the earth it has all the character and conditions of a warfare. "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Christian life is not a holiday parade, but a hand-to-hand conflict. Nevertheless, if truly in Christ are we even now "more than conquerors," hopeful amid the oversweeping tides of the battle, and joyous as "men rejoice who divide the spoil." Such even the mortal conditions of the Christian soldier. But who shall speak of the heavenly and immortal? Of the rapturous experience of the Risen Spirit? Of the majesty of him whom God delighteth to honor? Of the palms and white robes and diadems that shall be given unto them that follow Christ in the regeneration through the conflict to the victory?

This only do we know, that presently, through the clouds that overshadow the battlefield, will there break heavenly light, and as we look it will wax fairer and brighter, and there will be sounds as of rolling wheels and mighty wings, and such a home-bringing in triumph as the old conquerors never dreamed of. Yonder high-way of sapphires will be strewn with flowers, and radiant with new lustres, and along it shall ride the victor, the palms of glory waving, the shouts of victory pealing, and the Eternal City will open wide her shining gates, and the

angelic armies divide their shining ranks, and beloved hands will shower immortal flowers, and seraphic voices welcome, the morning stars singing together, the Sons of God shouting for joy as he comes from the battle in triumph—"*the good soldier of Christ!*"

And who then would not be a Christian? Oh, men of noble heart, with immortal pulses bounding within you, and eternal realities rising before you, why shrink you from a battle whose victory is so glorious? Christ wants you among his soldiers! The world is not yet conquered by faith, and vice sits enthroned in its high places, and prophecy and the signs of the times call for the enlistment of mighty men, for the great battle of God Almighty! This church wants you! The old soldiers are falling around you, and the places of standard bearer and mighty men are vacant in the midst of us, and we want your strength, your energies, your zeal, your love, we want them all in this struggle for Christ with a revolted world!

And you, too, need the reward! Oh, why will you so strive for this poor world, and the flowers that die, and the toys that are shattered, when Heaven offers you the things that are unseen and eternal? God made you for great things—that hand to grasp a sceptre!—that brow to wear a diadem!—that soul, to be a king and a priest for ever and ever! Why, then, do you linger and stand back from the battle? Alas for the madness of this pro-

crastination! Christian faith is not a tear of sorrow, wrung out on a death-bed. Oh no! It is the struggle of a life-time in a spiritual warfare! And a dying man, with his cold heart and palsied hand cannot wage it unto victory! Tell me not, then, of a "future time" and a "convenient season." To-morrow! Why look ye!—the next tidings from the great plain may be of a battle fought—and a victory lost, lost forever! To-day, then, make your decision! See, the heavenly standard is unrolled; men are enlisting for the warfare; Christ offers you priceless things:—the sceptre, the white robe, the diadem, "the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" Come, then, while it is called to-day! Come be a child of God! A follower of Jesus! A king! A conqueror! "*A good soldier of Jesus Christ!*"